

Message Text

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USINT ALGIERS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

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AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 204

DEPT PASS CAIRO IMMEDIATE

BEIRUT PASS DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: ANNOUNCEMENT OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNITY

1. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY OF EMBASSY'S DETAILED ANALYSIS
OF ANNOUNCEMENT OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNITY. REMAINDER OF
ANALYSIS FOLLOWS IN SUBSEQUENT CABLE.

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2. ANNOUNCEMENT JANUARY 12 OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNITY,

DURING BOURGUIBA-QADHAFI MEETING AT DJERBA, CAME AS SURPRISE TO TUNISIANS AND FOREIGNERS ALIKE. ANNOUNCEMENT RAN COUNTER TO BOURGUIBA'S LONG STANDING POSITION THAT NO ARAB UNITY OF ANY KIND CAN BE ACHIEVED EXCEPT AFTER "GENERATIONS" CAREFUL PREPARATION AND IN STAGES. AGREEMENT APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN CONCLUDED IN A HURRY, ALTHOUGH MASMOUDI TOLD ME TEN DAYS AGO THAT QADHAIF WAS ANXIOUS FOR UNION AND THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE TUNISIAN TALK OVER PAST YEAR OF MAGHREBIAN UNITY.

3. IT MAY BE THAT BOURGUIBA CAUGHT QADHAFI, JILTED BY SADAT "ON THE REBOUND". QADHAFI, PROBABLY EGGED ON BY MASMOUDI, CAUGHT BOURGUIBA AT MOMENT OF WEAKNESS: EXTREMELY TIRED, SUBJECT TO MENTAL LAPSES AND DEVOID OF THREE ADVISORS WHO PROBABLY WOULD HAVE ADVISED OTHERWISE. (PRIME MINISTER, BOURGUIBA, JR. AND WFIE, WASSILA WERE ALL OUT OF COUNTRY). NO DOUBT QADHAFI PLAYED ON BOURGUIBA'S EGOCENTRICITY BY OFFERING HIM THE UNION PRESIDENCE -- WHICH PRESUMABLY OVERCAME ANY LINGERING CONCERN BOURGUIBA MAY HAVE HAD RE OPENING TUNISIA SO HANDILY TO QADHAFI'S DELETERIOUS INFLUENCE.

4. THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE OF MASMOUDI'S POWER-PLAY -- MOST MINISTERS PRESENT AT DJERBA, PLUS INFLUENTIAL BANKER, WERE MASMOUDI SUPPORTERS. (COULD IT BE THAT THEY, GENERALLY UNPOPULAR IN TUNISIA, ARE PINNING THEIR HOPES ON QADHAFI TO SUPPORT THEM IN POST-BOURGUIBA SUCCESSION STRUGGLES).

5. PUBLIC REACTION IN GENERAL, AS EXPRESSED THUS FAR BY INFORMATIONAL MEDIA AND INFORMAL POPULAR DEMONSTRATIONS (LATTER PROBABLY PARTY-SUPPORTED), HAS BEEN FAVORABLE. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE SOME ANTI-BOURGUIBA STATEMENTS (BUT NOT NECESSARILY ANTI-UNION) DURING A MODEST DEMONSTRATION IN TUNIS JAN 12, SOEM LEFT-WING; PRO-ALGERIAN STUDENTS HAVE PROCLAIMED THEIR OPPOSITION. PRIVATELY WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING MIXED REACTIONS. PROSPECT OF INCREASED ECONOMIC WEALTH AND MORE JOBS FOR TUNISIAN BOTH HERE AND IN LIBYA ARE BEING CITED FAVORABLY. CONSIDERABLE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
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ARE RECEIVING NEGATIVE COMMENT. MILITARY, WHO ALSO CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, HAVE BEEN THUS FAR SILENT. THEIR ATTITUDE COULD, OF COURSE, BE CRUCIAL. AT THIS STAGE THERE NO INDICATION THAT THEY WON'T GO ALONG WITH IT IF THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT BOURGUIBA WANTS IT. TUNISIANS IN SOUTH, WHO HAVE BEEN TRADITIONALLY DISCONTENTED WITH CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND HAVE LONG BEEN EXPOSED TO TRIPOLI RADIO, HAVE BEEN ENTHUSIASTIC.

NEVERTHELESS, INDICATIONS ARE THAT TUNISIAN BOURGEOISIE IS NOT RPT NOT PLEASED AND IT CAN BE EXPECTED TO WORK BEHIND SCENES IN EFFORT TO SLOW DOWN ON UNITY PROGRAM.

6. OUR GUESS IS THAT FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNITY WILL CONTINUE TO BE SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE FANFARE OF WORDS IN TADITIOANL ARAB STYPLE. BEYOND THAT, ALREADY-EXISTENT JOINT COMMITTEES WILL MEET MORE ACTIVELY, SOME SERVICES WILL PERHAPS BE COMMUNALIZED, AND THE TWO ECONOMIES WILL BECOME MORE CLOSELY LINKED. BUT POLITICAL UNTIY IN NEAR FUTURE SEEMS UNLIKELY, THERE ARE TOO MANY PROBLEMS AND BUILT-IN OBSTACLES INCLUDING NOT ONLY THE CENTRIFUGAL ARAB NATURE BUT THE BASIC FACT THT LIBYA IS A REFORMIST-MILITARY, STRONGLY ISLAM MILITARY DICTATORSHIP WHILE TUNISIA ENJOYS A MORE OPEN AND RELAXED SOCIETY WHICH KEEPS ITS MILITARY IN PLACE.

7. IF OUR PREDICTION PROVES CORRECT (I.E. THAT POLITICAL UNITY IS UNACHIEVABLE IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE), SHORT-RUN US INTERESTS IN TUNISIA WILL BE PRESERVED. ESSENTIALLY MODERATE AND ENLIGHTENED NATURE OF TUNISIAN POLICY WOULD REMAIN, WHILE QADHAFI'S DISPOSITION TO LISTEN TO -- AND PERHAPS EVEN BE ENFLUENCED BY -- PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA MIGHT BE ENHANCED BY THIS CLOSER EMBRACE. HOWEVER, ON ASSUMPTION QADHAFI SEEKS CONTINUE TO MAKE TUNISIA OVER INTO HIS OWN IMAGE, HIS CAPABILITY FOR LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SUBVERSION WILL BE ENHANCED BY THIS NEW RELATIONSHIPM.

8. SHOULD WE BE PROVEN WRONG (I.E., POLITICAL UNITY OCCURS IN COMING MONTHS), MODERATE TUNISIAN POLICY ORIENTATION RISKS BEING COMPROMISED BY QADHAFI, AND
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ONCE BOURGUIBA LEAVES THE SCENE, MUCH YOUNGER LEADER WILL BE IN GOOD POSITION TO DOMINATE TUNISIA COMPLETELY. OBVIOUSLY, THIS WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE IN US INTERESTS.

9. FOR TIME BEING WE SHOULD SIT TIGHT AND INITIATE NO CHANGE IN OUR POLICY TOWARD OR OUR PROGRAMS IN TUNISIA. AS INDICATED SEPTTEL (NOTAL), BOURGUIBA'S APPARENT COMECPTION OF WHAT UNITY WILL LEAD TO, AND WHAT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY (ONE PRESIDENT, ON CONSTITUTION, ONE ARMY, SAME EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL POWERS, ONE FLAG), SEEM TO DIFFER CONSIDERABLY. A SHAKEDOWN PERIOD DURING WHICH BOURGUIBA GETS HIS BADLY-NEEDED REST IN SWITZERLAND, DURING WHICH HIS THREE KEY ADVISERS ARE AVAILABLE, AND DURING WHICH

THE TUNISIAN BOURGEOISIE HAVE TIME TO MOUNT DISCREET
OPPOSITION, MAY NOW BE NECESSARY BEFORE MAIN LINES
OF DIRECTION TUNISIA WILL BE TAKING IN NEAR
FUTURE BEGIN EMERGE CLEARLY.

SEELYE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CAIRO.

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